

**Sustainability For The Survival of Future Generations in Barbara  
Kingsolver's  
*Prodigal Summer: An Eco-Critical Approach***

**Sujitha. P**

Doctoral Scholar

Reg. No.: 19213214012002

Research Centre for English ,

St. Jerome's College, Nagercoil

(Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli)

**Dr. M. Leema Rose**

Supervisor & Head

Research Centre for English

St. Jerome's College Nagercoil

(Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli)

**Abstract**

Barbara Kingsolver is an award-winning author whose books are not only well-known in the United States but have also been translated into various languages. As a nature lover, her works often focus on the social and environmental problems of the world. The consumer attitude of mankind is the primary cause of most anti-environmental behaviours that lead to nature degradation. Sustainability is a concept used when referring to the various human actions embraced with the objective of ensuring the ability of the future generations to fulfill their needs using the available natural resources. Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer* is one of such literary works that have featured sustainability and environmental conservation as the main themes in their plots. Kingsolver uses three protagonists to develop the idea of sustainability in environmental, economic and social aspects. She demonstrates a complex mutual relationship between human beings and the natural wildlife resources. The author also uses the main characters characteristic of great passion for protecting the ecosystem to demonstrate the importance of maintaining an ecological balance for the sake of future generations. Human beings should envision in the concept of environmental protection to support sustainable lives for the future generations.

**Keywords:** Sustainability, environment, ecological balance, Survival.

Kingsolver has been acclaimed as an eco friendly writer and her education in biology is on display in her book *Prodigal summer*, with ecological concept and biological facts. The

novel *Prodigal Summer* is comprised of three stories that are correlated through a complex network of relationships. The events of the story unfold in a small society living in Southern Appalachia.

Sustainable growth becomes a common goal for all human beings on the planet. The awareness about the concept helps people to explore their mutual relationships with the earth's resources, wild life and other people. In this novel *Prodigal Summer* the author uses the main protagonists of the story Deana Wolfe Lusa Landowska and Garnett Walker to show interdependence between the natural environment and its living inhabitants as well as human beings and the relationship they have with the natural ecosystem. The novel presents the theme of sustainability by demonstrating the social responsibility of people to preserve the natural world from the threat of extinction that would risk the survival of future generations.

Kingsolver tries to show the importance of biodiversity through Deanna Wolfe's love of the coyote. Deanna's chapters are called *Predators*, Lusa's *Moth Love* and Garnett's are *Old Chestnuts*. Deanna is a reclusive wildlife conservative agent and a biologist in an isolated mountain environment. She is also a predator lover overseeing a den of coyotes that had recently migrated to the region. The events of the second chapter revolves around Lusa Maluf Landowski, a moth lover, who lives several miles away from the mountain. The female character originates from a small town and later happens to be a farmer's wife in the Southern Appalachian society thus making it her profession. Garnett is introduced in the third chapter of the book, "Old Chestnuts", championing for the extinct American chestnut tree.

During one of the humid summer seasons, as the natural urge for propagation engulfed the south Appalachian countryside, the three characters discover a complex network of relationships between each other. They also notice their mutual connection with the natural ecosystem environment they dwell in it. The three characters discover their communal circles and social relationships embedded by intimacy, the realities of small-scale farming, and the biodiversity of the region. Through these events, Kingsolver's *Prodigal summer* demonstrates the theme of sustainability for the survivability of future generations.

The work begins as three separate stories of humans in their Appalachian environments of Lebulon county, dealing with the ups and downs of life. In the end, all three stories come together, displaying how everything is once again, interconnected. "Every quiet step is thunder to beetle life underfoot, a tug of impalpable thread on the web pulling mate to

mate and predator to prey, a beginning or an end. Every choice is a world made new for the chosen” (PS 446, 447).

Eventhough humans are a different species than coyotes and moths and trees, all deserve a place in the world since we depend on each other for different functions. In the end, Kingsolver states that humans are not independent from their environment.

The first thematic presentation of sustainability takes place in the first chapter of the Kingsolver’s *Prodigal Summer*. The author describes a vibrant mountain ecosystem comprising of wild animals and forest plants. Deanna is also described as an environmentalist who is a conservative wildlife agent in one of the outposts of the mountain. She had a great passion for conserving the wildlife and protecting the ecosystem from destruction by human economic activities. She chose to abandon the small city life to lead a solitude life in the forest and protect the wildlife from unscrupulous poachers. At the beginning of the novel’s plot, a den of coyotes had just migrated to the Appalachian region following the favourable climatic conditions in the area that promoted the survivability of the animals. Deanna was determined to protect the natural world from the threat of destruction by human economic activities. For instance, she once met with hunter, Eddie Bondo, carrying a gun for killing the prey and they ended up in a fierce quarrel. Deana says, “I believe we’re on National Forest land inside of a game –protection area where there’s no hunting” (PS 7)

Deanna saw hunting as a great threat to the ecosystem to which she was entirely devoted to protecting out of her passion. Coyote is one of the “Keystone species” which has a very less population now than the earlier times. Their extinction can bring drastic changes in environment and it will cause loss of biodiversity. Deanna feels that every little creature has the right to live on this earth. She as a forest ranger observes carefully the diversity in forest transition radically.

Plenty of people had watched and recorded the disaster of dominating a predator plenty of people had watched and recorded the disaster of eliminating a predator from a system. They were watching it here in her own beloved mountains, where North America’s richest biological home was losing its richness to one extinction after another, of plants and birds, fish, mammals, moths and stoneflies, and especially the river creatures whose names she collected like beads: sugarspoon, fork-shell, acornshell, leafshell. Sixty-five kinds of mussels, twenty now gone for good. There were hundreds of reasons for each death-pesticide runoff,

slit from tilling, and cattle in the creek-but for Deanna each one was also a piece in the puzzle she's spent years working out. (PS 65)

Here Deanna's environmental consciousness shows her ethical relationship with the non-human animals. All these events are used to advance the author's concept of sustainability for a better ecosystem balance and protection of certain species from extinction. Disruptions in the environmental dynamics due to ferocious human activities can significantly affect the survivability of some plant and animal species. Consequently, the future of a sustainable life of the human generation would be threatened as some of the natural resources become scarce.

Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer* also extends the knowledge of sustainability in the second chapter that involves events around one Lusa Maluf Landowski. Lusa is used in illustrating how various farming practices can affect the environment and influence the survivability of future human generations. She lives in a farm several miles down the mountain, she left her job as an entomologist and returned to live a farm life with her husband, but after her husband Cole's sudden death she finds herself unexpectedly marooned in a strange new place where she initially cannot find any attachment to the land. She was in dilemma whether to stay back and live the farm life or go back to the city Kentucky. But, finally she stays in farm at her husband's house trying to accept her new environment, she becomes closer to nature and she starts to observe and appreciate it delightfully. Lusa had unique sense of love for moths and insects also she was very much aware of the value of non-human beings. Her love for natural environment and her environmental awareness to preserve and protect reflects in these lines, "I will not cut down those trees. I don't care if there's a hundred thousand dollars' worth of lumber on the back of this farm. I'm not selling it. It's what I love best about this place". (PS 125)

She began to love The trees, the moths. The foxes, all the wild things that live up there" (PS 125) Lusa believes in living healthy environment so her refusal to plant Tobacco on her farm reflects her environmental awareness about land use. She ultimately found her own way to live peacefully and started rejoicing in natural surrounding and observes nature's wonder closely. Lusa utilises the organic methods of farming to maintain a balanced ecosystem and prevent deaths of the endangered species of living organisms from extinction. However, her neighbouring farmers practice an artificial control of pests by the use of pesticides. She explains the benefits of organic farming methods including of sustainable ecosystem for the future sustainability of the human race. Lusa states, Can you believe people

spray insecticide all over their fields?’s be shook the last stragglers out of the two nets. “Look at all the beautiful creatures that die. It’s like dropping a bomb on a city just to get rid of a couple of bad guys (PS 301, 302).

Kingsolver manages to express the concept of sustainability through these events by showing the risks associated with inorganic farming practices. Consequently, this may result in an imbalance in the ecosystem and the future of generations and economic sustainability of the future human generations.

The third thematic presentation of sustainability takes place in the third chapter of the Kingsolver’s *Prodigal Summer*. In this chapter, Garnett, an oldman, is presented as a character afflicted with the negative implications of some human activities. Garnett often dispute with his neighbour, Nannie Rawley, who is a devotee of cultivating organic fruits and vegetables. Nannie cultivates organic apples on the nearby orchard. She believes doing gardening in organic way quite opposite to the way of Garnett walker, who completely trusted using the pesticide and herbicide to protect his close to heart old chestnut trees which are diminishing day by day and he believes in spraying pesticide to protect his chestnut seedlings. Garnett uses pesticides and herbicides to keep his land tidy and also to protect his saplings.

Nannie’s environmental awareness shows in her organic way of living. She has a special kind of admiration for living creatures. She gives respect to the non-human creature. Due to these pesticides the predatory animals can die and may cause an uncontrolled breeding of the prey. The consequence of this is that the prey may complete for the available food in the natural environment eventually leading to its scarcity. Therefore, the survivability of the entire population of the animals may be threatened to the extent of their death and thus causing an ecological imbalance. Trees are a vital constituent of the environment or maintaining appropriate levels of carbondioxide gas in the atmosphere. Kingsolver demonstrates this fact through Garnet’s campaigns against the extinction of the chestnut tree as,

He was haunted by the ghosts of these old chestnuts, by the great emptiness their extinction had left in the world, and so this was something Garnett did from time to time, like going to the cemetery to be with dead relatives: he admired chestnut wood. (PS 130)

Kingsolver explains the threat to the sustainability of the future generations as trees and the size of forests gradually decrease. This situation could possibly lead to global warming and the rise in the sea level.

Sustainability is a goal to be achieved by the human race of the social well being of future generations. Such factors include the environmental, economic and social aspects of the ecosystem. Sustainable growth involves a set of environmental, conservation and protection strategies to minimise the destruction caused by the human economic activities. The author manages to use three interrelated stories to present the different aspects of environmental sustainability. Kingsolver expressed the love for conserving the natural environment through the main protagonists Deanne Wolfe, Lusa Landowski and Garnett Walker. She explains the interdependence between plants, insects, animals as well as human beings for the survivability of each other. Kingsolver shows the importance of protecting each element of the ecosystem to prevent the endangered species from extinction. Kingsolver extends the knowledge of sustainability by using the novel *Prodigal Summer* to ensure the protection of the ecological balance. These conservation practices are meant to make sure that the future human generations will meet their needs using the available natural resources.

## **REFERENCE**

Kingsolver, Barbara. *Prodigal Summer*, Faber and Faber, 2013.